

Center for Modern Greek Studies
Greek American Oral History Project
Transcription

Tape: A6

Subject: Helen Ernst (HE)
Interviewer: M.N. Goldworth (I)
Date of Interview: June 18, 2001

Transcriber: Nicole Sauvageau
Date of Transcription: Spring 2005

Editor/Translator: Nicole Fernandez

Tape 1, Side A
Counter: {000}

I: Ok, this is June, do you know?

HE: 18th.

I: June 18th, 2001. This is the oral history recording of Helen Ernst: E-R-N-S-T and done by the interviewer, me, Mary Nicholson Goldworth. And the project name is The Greek American Oral History Archive and we are recording at the home of Helen Ernst at number 2319 Blueridge Avenue in Menlo Park, California. And this is tape number 1. And we are ready to begin now. My first question is: what leads you to consider yourself to be of Greek heritage?

HE: What leads me to believe that? Well, I grew up in a very close family. My mother was one of seven siblings and my grandfather came to this, this country before 1900 and brought his family over three or four years later. And we just lived that way. We had our, we went to Holy Trinity Church, we were there at Easter, we were there at all the feast days, we were at the picnics, our friends were their friends, my grandfather's friends and their children, and their grandchildren were just part of our lives. Really wasn't much other—we didn't do much else but associate with that group through the early part of my life.

I: Ok. We'll move to the question of how the change took place, the move from leaving another country, what other country that was, for your parents, or perhaps your grandparents in this case, and what led, well, who were the immigrants first, I think you mentioned your grandfather.

HE: My grandfather, Peter George. Peter Georgopoulos, actually. And, Americanized Peter George and his wife, my grandmother, Spiridoula. They came from Kyparissia which is on the western side of the Peloponnesus and he was just looking for a better life for his children than he could see. You know, their future in Greece was not what he felt that he wanted and this is why he came.

I: Can you give us a little picture of what that life was like? Where they were? Where your grandfather was.

HE: Well, I was in the town. I was in Kyparissia, I've been there several times. And I've seen their home, which was in what was called Old Kyparissia and it was quite magnificent. An old, old country house. He was the manager, from what I understand, he managed a, I say ranch, I doubt they use that word there in Greece, but for a doctor, from Athens. And he was his ranch manager, or his farm manager, whatever you want to say. And, I think maybe the contact with him, he was rather close to him-- and I don't know-- I think from the time he was young --

he somehow knew this family in Athens. And I think that maybe the hearing of, from the Athenian view, what was here, and what you could do with your children, and educate your children- so and I think that's probably what brought him here. I know that he wanted – they were all educated – that her first, first, rule in that family.

I: When the original town- would you spell it for us?

HE: Kyparissia? <talking simultaneously> Let me have your pen for a minute, because you know why--

I: <talking simultaneously> I have a spelling here that you gave me. I have a spelling right here that you gave me.

HE: Oh, I did this before?

I: Oh, we did it on the preliminary.

HE: Kyparissia. I think it's K- sometimes it's spelled differently – but I, I always- K-Y-P-A-R-I-double S-I-A is correct.

I: And, so, there were, there was not much schooling in Kyparissia?

HE: Well, I know they had elementary school because my uncles, I know that they went to school, but I don't know beyond the elementary grades where their possibilities were. <pause> So--

I: I think we'd like to record the dates of birth and you already told us the countries of origin. But, let's get your parents' or your grandparents' dates of birth in there, if we can.

HE: Gosh, I should have that written down. Did I give that to you at all?

I: You gave me your grandmother-- your grandfather, question mark 1862, for a birth date.

HE: And my grandmother--

I: And grandmother 1870.

HE: Yes, that's about right.

I: And they were both in the--

HE: Yes, cause she- that's right – that's the right date.

I: OK. And the area for your grandfather?

HE: He was from the-- I can't recall and I must get that, find that, I can't remember the name of his town, but he's from the Mani, was from central Greece.

I: Could you spell that?

HE: M-A-N-I. My grandmother was born in Gythion

I: And spell that.

HE: G-Y-T-H-I-O-N. And that's at the southern-most part, on the water of the Peloponnese. And when they- after they were married, then they went to Kyparissia.

I: Oh, yes.

HE: They were not born there.

I: Yes, oh, yes, ok. And you already described the reason that they left was that they heard there could be a better life in the United States.

HE: Exactly. That was it.

I: Or did they think about moving to Athens- you said that they had-

HE: No, he worked for the doctor in Athens and I think that this is probably what he- he worked for him- and there was a lot of contact with him because he used to quote things about this doctor – I don't know his name. But I think that aside from a working relationship, there was a lot of communication.

I: So he had more of a picture of what might be there for him in the future, if he left Greece.

HE: If he left. But he did not take – he did not want to take his family until he had a place for them. So he came alone.

I: And do you have a date of when he left Greece?

HE: You know, I'm going to have to get this. I think the date would be five years before this--

I: This is a court certification immigration--

HE: This is what you got instead of just a number – this is what- and I have – I'm the one who received it from my – my oldest uncle gave it to me to keep. So this is

1901 and it says five years prior to that. So I would say – this is dated 1901, is that correct?

I: Yes.

HE: In open court, alright? So, and it also tells us that he was a, lived in this country for five years prior to that. I think they – somebody says this in here. I--

I: Yes, and this is the declaration of his-

HE: Of his residency and his citizenship.

I: Ok, dated 1901 and--

HE: October 26th.

I: October 26th and this was in the city and county of San Francisco in the state of California. OK.

HE: And do you see here where he renounced all loyalties – especially, particularly to the king of Greece. <laughs> That was straight out.

I: Yes, it says it right there in print. OK. Now it's clear that we're talking about your grandfather, but that was so closely related to your own father and mother – that is part of the story.

HE: My father? My mother – well, my mother was only – then when he brought his family over, my mother was only five or four.

I: And that was when your mother arrived, too?

HE: My mother arrived after the citizenship.

I: Oh, yes, ok.

HE: See, I believe my mother and my grandmother- three of the oldest children came a little bit earlier. I believe my mother and my grandmother and the other two children came later and I believe that was 1903. Then after-- There were five children that he left behind – the two older boys with my grandmother's young brothers and then one of the brothers brought two of the older boys then the other brother brought my grandmother and the other three children. I mean, they accompanied – the two younger – my grandmother had younger brothers – maybe eighteen, nineteen. One came with two of the boys and the other came with the others. So they all – the two brothers, her uncles, my mother's uncles, immigrated at the same time with the family and then there were two children born later.

I: OK, so we're talking about your father's arrival.

HE: My father arrived – did I give you the date for that before?

I: No, we didn't talk the date of arrival.

HE: Did you want to ask about my father?

I: Well, actually you were talking about your mother. Maybe we could just-

HE: This is the George family here-

I: Yes. You were saying that your mother arrived when she was five years old-

HE: Four. People asked her how long she-- when did she come and she'd say, "*Meta Columbo* <'After Columbus' {113}>." That was her story, "*Meta Columbo*."

I: That was a long time ago.

HE: Well, she and Columbus, that's right.

I: So, it was sometime around. What year? Let's see, 1903. And she was four--

HE: And she was four or five. She was probably five by that time.

I: But that-- came to the United States.

HE: Yeah, in 1903, right.

I: And your father's date of arrival? The George side of the family-

HE: No, my father was Julius. My mother was a George. And my name – my father was Gouzelis and he came--

I: Would you spell that for us, please?

HE: G-O-U-Z-E-L-I-S. That's the spelling I see mostly is that. And that is the name that comes from the Turkish and it means "handsome <laughs> of wonderful continents." That's the story I've heard and I've heard it from different people so I guess it's true, I remembering hearing it since I was a little girl, because he came from a section of Greece that was, on the east side of the Peloponnesus and it was called...a little, very small village called Haraka, way up in the mountaintops and to get there –

I: Would you spell that, please?

HE: Haraka? H-A-- It's spelled different ways on different maps, but I always spell it H-A-R-A-K-A. And he came when he was nine years old and, which means that he came at—he was born in 1886 – so, three. He came when he was nine. And my uncle who had preceded him was 15 years older and the head of the family back in Haraka. And he sent for him and he came along with his little friend, his family friend and sorta related was-- Did you ever hear of Black Jack Jerome? John Jerome? He's famous here. Well, John Jerome was a little boy also. My uncle brought them from Haraka to San Francisco. My father was nine. And I think--

I: He was nine so we figure from 1886 or so plus nine is 1905. Six and nine.

HE: Nine and 1886 would be. 1896, I guess. What'd we say 1886 plus nine. 1895-

I: Oh yeah, I'm sorry. 1895 would be-- to give the approximate date of arrival-

HE: --and my uncle had a candy factory, called for some reason the Los Angeles Candy Factory.

I: Although they were in San Francisco.

HE: That was in San Francisco and I have pictures of that. In fact, the building I think is still there. The last time I checked it was and that's a few years ago, but today with all the tear-downs there are, I don't know if it's still there. And they worked, did not go to school, worked for my uncle. And they-- Do you want to know how much they received a week?

I: Sure.

HE: Twenty cents.

I: A week?

HE: <laughs> That's what Jerome told my-my father died when I was a baby and my brother John was not born, my mother was six months pregnant. But Jerome, known as Black Jack, and I'll tell you that sometime maybe off the tape – or it doesn't make any difference. He was a strikebreaker eventually, and that's where the Black Jack came from. He was famous in San Francisco.

I: We were not settled in.

HE: Yea, you weren't there yet. And he's famous probably to me and my, some of the, you know, of us. Some people had never heard of – but Daisy's still living, his wife. She's nearly in her nineties. Jerome told, and he christened my brother named as his godfather so he told him that they did not like my uncle, July, we

used to call him Uncle July, Julius, yeah, because he was such a, I guess, a tyrant and a slave driver. And twenty cents a week. And how was it? If they took the street car to the beach, that was five cents and if they bought popcorn that was five, but also they were obligated to go put something in the box at church. So they had to really think about that twenty cents. Now that sounds impossible, but Jerome told that to my brother years ago. He never could get over it.

<both talking simultaneously, unintelligible {169-170}>

HE: --and they didn't have to go to school. My father was self-educated. And after the earthquake, my uncle moved to Los Angeles and turned the business over to my father. He was quite young then. And he died in 1919.

I: Now describe what the business was.

HE: It was a factory. A candy factory. A big--

I: Do you remember-

HE: No, cause I was just a baby when my father died and, but it was, I think he was one of the first people to distribute Coca-Cola syrup and he had a very wonderful business. He was a good businessman. He'd learned the hard way, you have to figure how to work out that twenty cents. But he took over the business, or he sold it to him or whatever way they did it, and he was very successful. I remember when I was little and I'd go to all the candy stores in San Francisco because at the time were owned by Greek people and we'd go -- my mother, we'd go -- you know, to whichever one it was and most of them were friends and they'd always, they would tell us about my father, what a good friend. They were all young when they came, they were immigrants. They were trying hard and so anyway, they appreciated each other.

I: When you went from one shop to another to visit maybe or-

HE: Yeah well, we would go on Polk street was-- Was it the Golden Poppy? There was Hermes out on Mission Street, that was the California Candy Kitchen. They were nationally sought out. They had wonderful candy. And those are the two that I remember mainly because Jan Papas was the one that had the Gold...in fact that you know Pat Aleck? Well that's her stepfather. So and he and my, he came from Haraka also. So we had- that's how I knew I was Greek when you ask--I mean how do I really--oh the network, yeah.

I: Yeah, a network of people. Can you tell anything about the consideration you father and mother had about becoming United States citizens? And we know he became a citizen quite early.

HE: Yeah, they were both so young you see.

I: Ah, how was <speaking simultaneously {202-206}>

HE: You know my grandfather <speaking simultaneously {202-206}>...that took care of his children then. Didn't it?

I: Yes, up until a certain age?

HE: Till they were of age.

I: I think eighteen. But, I don't know what the rules were in that time.

HE: But they were beyond their ages then. Because, I never heard of any--there was nothing, you know, about that. They never discussed it with me because I think it was just done.

I: Yes-no, but your mother lived quite a few years after.

HE: My mother died in 1989.

I: So, was she, what was her citizenship status then?

HE: Well, she was only four when she came. So she was a citizen already under her father- See all his children-all my aunts and uncles were citizens I think when they- because of him.

I: Ok. And then she did have to uh apply as an adult to get her own papers. She was a citizen by then. Umm, what do you think that they were expected to learn about America and being a citizen here in this country at the time? Was there any kind of image of that that you picked up?

HE: Not really, other than <pause> I know that my grandfather, being one of the very early settlers, became very involved in the city other than the Greek. He was one of the leaders of the Greek Community and therefore was, I don't want to say sought after but he was included in so many things because of course there for the vote...I have pictures of banquets. We have lots of those that-- big banquet halls. Big banquets and for going- and he was there because it was for then maybe <unintelligible {224}>or early politicians so this was where-- and then he established a very successful business, a market. But, it was one of—I remember it was like the first supermarket. Which isn't the way we see supermarkets. I think it was the first not little grocery store in what it was on mission.

I: So he was participating in the industry?

HE: He participated. He moved right into the stream. He really did. He didn't but still kept his friends, and his contacts, his Greekness you know. But he came ya know, he became an American too.

I: Yes. Do you think that your mother was involved in any kind of a process that was including herself as a citizen as well, or that was different than the way things were done in her country?

HE: I think my mother just moved into the American way of life. My grandmother died when she was thirty--she left seven children when she was thirty-seven. And my mother went to boarding school, and one of my aunts, my grandpa at Dominican sisters in Saint Catherine's in Benicia, first convent in the state. So, and she was I think maybe ten or eleven when her mother died. So, she had that you see. She was still Greek but she still was learning so much and she was just--for years would quote sister somebody or sister this who would talk to her about-- So that she was constantly learning other, learning about being an American.

I: Yes.

HE: There was more--there was more contact and more outreach from there because she was away from the Greek community, but still came home and was part of it.

I: So there really wasn't that much of a contrast that she could-- that she experienced between the life in the old country and her life here?

HE: I don't think so. No I don't believe at that age it would have been, and when my uncle Jim George was eighteen months younger and then there were two little girls that were born here. And, they they didn't ever remember to much about Greece.

I: Mmhm. Or some of it maybe just a little. I wonder if some of it was carried on through the parents or, as to how-- Can you remember anything? What can you remember about that was reported to you about how it used to be in the old country different from the way it was here for them?

HE: Not for my mother because I don't think she remembered that much. I do know that she said that they used to swim in the beautiful blue water she remembers that as a little girl, in Kyparissia which is on the coast. And, my grandfather, do you want what, he did tell me about how he came to San Francisco. Would you like to hear about that, or would you rather wait?

I: We are looking for a comparison between the two.

HE: He came- well I'll tell you he came-- He came with a man by the name of Lycurgos. They both came together, from Kyparissia.

I Can you spell his name?

HE: George Lycurgos. I think its L-Y-C-U-R-G-O-S and he— They went I remember he told me they went to Lowell, and they went to Birmingham, and to Chicago. And he would tell me this. I spent a lot of time with my grandfather and he would tell me these stories and they were- all these places had dark city buildings and smoky. And then they went to as far as the Hawaiian Islands and he told me it was thirty dollars to go to <unintelligible {281}>. They went that far. And, George Lycurgos returned and became very famous on the Island of, in Hilo, he owned the, owns about-- His family still has a volcano house of the volcano there, ya know. He went back there and my father- my grandfather chose San Francisco as more like what they left as far as surroundings, environment, the water, white buildings, clean at that time.

I: Can we switch to the story about your marriage, how you met your husband, what the courtship if you can give us a bit of that?

HE: <laughs> Well, I met my husband during the war. I was a WAVE officer and that was most unusual a community. That was really, caused quite a stir when I went in the Navy, but that my mother would even think of this. That is how old I am <laughs> you go way back to those days you know? It was really a big thing for me to be allowed to but I did apply for commission. I was just out of school, just out of Berkeley. And--

I: Well, maybe you can switch over to that part of the story, which precedes you marriage then, to the part about you joining the wave.

HE: Oh yes, well then- Well, I finished Berkeley as a history major and the war started-- the war started. So I worked for well Fort Mason, for a special project that I was in. And then, the WAVE's in 1942- August of '42 the congress passed the bill for the WAVE's prior to that the WAC's. The army women had come in. And it was limited, I believe, to 5000 listed and 1000 officers that started this. And, I remember my mother reading the paper and saying: "Helen, you know this might be something we could- you could think about." My brother in the meantime was at Stanford, but he had been in the National Guard and he was called out in 1937, for a year- they called out the National Guard for a year. Well, it turned out seven years for him because then this was before the war. The Guard was called out and he was up in the Aleutians and so on during-- when Pearl Harbor happened and of course that was the impetus for me to go and, you know, my brother was at the war and here we were at war and this was after Pearl Harbor. So, I applied and I received a commission probationary--we had six weeks. I went to Mt. H—right there on Market at the Naval whatever it was down there. It was an office there. And so on November tenth '42, I went East to Mt. Holy Oak and to Smith College. We had those places where we hadn't-- where we trained for six weeks and also received a permanent commission or were returned home. This was probationary and was tough, yes it was very tough. I

still I don't know why we had to memorize silhouettes of ships and planes and we had to learn the blue jackets manual which was the Navy training manual. We had to learn all that. We did not go overseas. We were limited to the United States at that time. And so I did receive my commission in December. And, I was assigned to Washington DC to the Bureau of Naval Personnel.

I: But, before you moved to Washington. Will you describe certain things that you did as part of the training? Is there anything else that comes to mind about that training period?

HE: Well, yes well I'll tell you what comes to mind-- Well, we had classes everyday. And as I say we had to really work hard and the people who were older-- I think there was a limit of forty-five years old. And my group we were the third class of WAVE officers and in that group in my room, my roommates—well, I'll go back this we were housed at Mt. Holly Oak, and they had, the Navy took over certain buildings and so on and so forth. So we were there-- my roommates. I had three roommates. One was the Dean of Women at the University of Redlands. One was the buyer of L&S Airmen in Philadelphia; I always remember this. And the third one was a librarian, a head librarian at Chicago, of the City Library. We were all sent there as Aviation WVP, Women's Volunteer Probationary. And at the end of six weeks you got WVS. You got a commission permanently.

I: And WVS was?

HE: WAVES- you know what, I can't remember. Women for Volunteer Service to America. Whatever- this is awful I don't remember what it was. But, WVP was probationary. W- uh then we came out with WVS and you know I can't remember what that—except that we were commissioned, permanently commissioned, and then were given our assignments. We went to class everyday. We marched and we pivoted. We marched! Oh we marched we had a trained marching. Oh yes, we had drill, drill people. We had drilling. We drilled. We went to class we just like they did with the men.

I: Were you armed?

HE: No. No we were not to go overseas or carry arms fortunately. And so then we were just given assignments- I was lucky because I could have had an assignment which of course was useful—

<tape cuts off {386}>

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Counter: {000}

HE: Yeah well, I was very fortunate. I received an assignment to Naval Personnel Bureau of Naval Personnel in Washington. And it was in aviation personnel and

that is were I met my husband. My job was to-- we were brought in to replace officers. And so I was brought into that office where he was, and strangely enough he had left San Francisco a year before and lived just about three blocks from me and I never knew him there. <laughs> Isn't that funny? So we met and then he went to, then he went to a carrier in Philadelphia. And that was were I-- and my work was signing, assigning officer,

I: Where were you located?

HE: Here at Naval Personnel in Washington D.C.

I: And you had already met Charles?

HE: I met him there, in that same I took- I was one of the WAVES that came in to replace the officers that were there who had to go to sea duty.

I: You didn't replace Charles?

HE: No, I couldn't have <talking over each other {012}> well we overlapped with them. I replaced someone called Louie Gardemall; I remember that. Somebody else replaced Charles and it was <unintelligible {014}> and then they went on to sea duty, but we overlapped.

I: <talking over each other> was there for only a short time?

HE: I would say two or three months because we had to learn our jobs too through them or with them, so they had been doing it.

I: Would you say that your courtship started?

HE: Started right there.

I: Could you describe anything about it?

HE: Well, we just -- I was on one side of this big room and he was on the other and that was -- also other young officers, you know, male officers -- and I think three of us came into that office at that one time for that assignment and he was just very hospitable. It was in December and it was just before Christmas when I landed there and was homesick, I was terribly homesick because my family always had Christmas, always together, and I remember he invited me to the home -- he and several officers had a home and help -- a cook and so on -- and they had invited me for New Year's Eve. Christmas Day I met two of my friends and we ate at some restaurant, three of us crying - <laughs> chewing and crying -- because we weren't home, but that was part of it all. And we dated, and then he went to Philadelphia to the Monterey, carrier Monterey, which was being-- had not been commissioned yet and it was finally commissioned and they went to the

Pacific. We were engaged before they left. My parents - my mother and my step-father in the meantime had died, I had a step-father, and he had died before Charles – I know what I'm talking about – oh, my mother and Charles' parents, who I had met, they had come to Washington, I'd met them, asked us to please wait – we wanted to be married then. They felt it was not fair to me, his parents. My mother just said – Turn that off a minute. Do you wanna turn that off for a second? <tape turned off {036}>

It was, they had, they were able to, they knew about the time we talked they knew about the time the ship would be commissioned and then of course would go on shakedown cruise and then go on to whatever it was assigned, which happened to be the Pacific, and I think it was – I'm quite sure it was when he called me about that, that they'd be leaving which was such a time -

I: Which was about leaving or?

HE: That they'd finally had news. He wanted me to come to the commissioning, that was it. Would I come up, would I be able to get – take off – and be able to come up to be there when the ship was commissioned. And then he wanted to talk to me about getting married, that was on that one call.

I: And you, the two of you were still in Washington, DC?

HE: No, he was in Philadelphia.

I: Oh.

HE: See, he left Washington after we – after we came in to replace these young officers then they went to their ships wherever. Charles went to the Monterey in Philadelphia which being under construction and working toward being commissioned to be part of the active fleet.

I: So you were still in Washington, DC?

HE: Oh, I was in Washington, oh yes.

I: And he was calling you from Philadelphia.

HE: Uh-huh.

I: And that's when the first proposal came.

HE: That was it. And that's when I to think, "Oh, wonderful, yes, that may be fine" and he bought me a ring actually. He came down, and then we talked to our parents and this is when we decided that they were right.

I: About the delay?

HE: Uh-huh.

I: How would you describe the differences in your cultural backgrounds or ethnic backgrounds?

HE: Well, we actually have very similar backgrounds because Charles' grandfather and grandmother immigrated from the Black Forest, in Germany, about the same time – in those, the latter part of the century to Boston. And his father was one of six children, and we have family pictures I'll show you later that are very similar. My grandfather and grandmother, the children, and Charles' grandmother, his grandfather had died, but his grandmother, Mutti <shortened word for grandmother{060}> they called, that was grandmother in German, and her six children. And they worked hard, his father was a baker – pardon me, Charles' grandfather that immigrated from Germany was a baker, and the children all worked with him at four o'clock in the morning they'd do delivery with the horse and buggy, you know, horse and wagon. And, uh, they all – the two girls went to Wellesley or pardon me, Radcliff, and three of the boys went to Harvard and graduated, went to Boston Public, which is the college preparatory, and I remember my father-in-law saying it was not "Do you want to go to college" but "You will be going to Harvard and you will be going to Radcliff" and this was the mother now because the father died when I think my father-in-law as eight years old.

I: So there was an emphasis on education?

HE: So it's the same as my grand – I think that brought us together too. We understood each other even though we were so American, but we could talk and tell all the same stories. Then when I met the family, I mean it was just like my own family, but those same values, you know, it was wonderful. And they all achieved.

I: How was the acceptance of each of your families?

HE: My mother was-

I: Of their backgrounds, I mean, not them personally.

HE: No, you mean, the Greek people, my whole family? Well, my mother – my aunts and uncles were not solidly "You must marry Greek." My mother would have liked it if it had worked out, but remember it was wartime and Charles was in the war, he was in the worst part of the Pacific battles, and so on, and she just wasn't – my mother was very open-minded, really and I think it would be natural to marry somebody who she knew and knew the family and so on, but immediately liked Charles when he came home. He came home right during the worst part of

the war in December of '43 and immediate acceptance, and the nicest part was that all her Greek lady friends loved him, too. They'd sit and they'd say, "Oh Charlie <unintelligible {088}>". So, there was never any problem there at all.

I: And then what about his side of the family?

HE: I think if they didn't I wouldn't have known it because they were very gentle and fine people. It was whatever Charles – and they accepted me, always. It was both ways, which was, we were lucky that way, too, that our families were like that.

I: When you participate in some of the Greek community activities I personally have been there so I know how you handle it, but just for part of your story, could you describe how that is for him when he comes to all these Greek affairs, and the other way around if you have something similar going in groups with his ethnic background.

HE: He's been an immediate supporter, always enjoyed the Greek community, was very, very happy in my family, you know, he was so accepted and they were just fine. And Charles has always participated, he's been treasurer of the golf tournament at Holy Cross Church in Belmont for I don't know how many years, and he's always supported me in anything I've done and I've always done the same with him with his work, his navy career, with – we accepted each other's friends and backgrounds, and we both, in other words.

I: He didn't have involvement with an ethnic community?

HE: No, because his family – no, they weren't as we were with the Greek community.

I: More mainstream.

HE: Well, they were in Boston, and I think they – and he, his father came out to Seattle and he went to school out in this area and so on. The involvement on my part with his side would have been with his businesses, acquaintances, his college friends, and his family.

I: Okay, let's go on to your story about your education. Where did you go to school? I know you have quite an extensive story there.

HE: I went to – well, from early on? From a child or high school?

I: Well, maybe just summarize the types of schools they were and where they were.

HE: Well, I went mainly – I started in public school in San Francisco Rochambeau, it was called Rochambeau, it was on 24th Avenue, I think. And when I was in the third grade I went to the French school Notre Dame de Victoire on Stockton Street. From there when I was ten, I went to St. Catherine's Academy in Benicia

where my mother had gone when she was a child after her grandmother died – remember I told you the girls, two little girls, were sisters there – and I was there until I was fourteen. And then I came back and I had, uh, one year in public school, Galileo, and then my mother – and then I went back to – I graduated from Star of the Sea in San Francisco. I went to Berkeley and then finished there, went to war, and when I came back I took advantage of the GI Bill and also the fact that I had children– well, I’ll just go back a minute. I had – my son was having trouble with his – he was speaking late – he was three years old or something – and I had a little girl, and anyway we decided – it was decided by his pediatrician that he should really be away from her and maybe be with other children in preschool. There weren’t the schools that we have today, so the only school on the Peninsula – the only place on the Peninsula that was not just a day care center was called the Child Care Center in Redwood City, and in order to have a child enrolled there the priorities were you had to be a nurse – this was right after the war – a teacher or the wife of a GI going probably to Stanford – going to school – and then if there was leftover, you know, places then you could qualify, but this was a waiting list only. And it was truly a nursery school. The women that ran it were actually from Boston, from I think it was Simmons College had a preschool training, you know, curriculum all those years ago, and so I wanted Charlie to go there, and the only way I could do that was by me enrolling in Stanford and going for my masters in education and a combination because I decided also then that I would like to teach because when I finished Berkeley I was a history major, and I thought I’d like my teaching credential and that’s what happened. So that’s what I did, and then I worked – I taught until – I taught for two years to earn my credential – that was the combination – but I had worked two years and then had my credential and then I stopped because my children were then first grade and, kindergarten or first grade, and I really needed to be home, so I did. And then when we went east, I taught when we – in 1952 my husband was transferred to New York and I substituted there, and went to Washington and did some substituting there. But when we came back to Menlo Park I did have a full-time job here because by this time they were in high school.

I: So would you describe what your occupation – your work situation?

HE: I have a K-12 credential. My teaching really was substituting in the middle grades, the upper grades, and uh, the last three years in Menlo I had the gifted program in the middle grades – worked with gifted. It was a period when we were doing a lot of experiments. We had contract teaching, you had team teaching – every few years we’d try something else where they tore the walls down and you had all fifth grades together and then you did grade level, you know. So I went through those years. It was most – it was wonderful because we had really good students in Menlo and supportive parents, and I liked it. And the reason I stopped – I retired early – because my husband was retiring and this way we could, you know, take trips together, and do things like that, so that’s why I quit. I think I’d still be teaching if I could because I loved it, I really did.

I: When was your date of retirement, more or less?

HE: I've been retired since 1974.

I: So you've had a whole different life since then.

HE: Yeah, we were able – we've had a very – and then I spent a lot of time with my mother. We took trips with her. We did – we just – I had <background noise {178}> that I'm so happy that I did, that I was able to do. And then we were able to travel – not in the summers, you know. Became grandparents, go visiting our grandchildren. Now we visit great-grandchildren – we have five.

I: So give us a listing of your children.

HE: My children? And their ages? I have Charles John who is 55, Vicky is 54 – Elizabeth Victoria is 54. Charles is married to a Korean girl, Eun An, very lovely young woman. They have a boy, Charles David, who is 23, who is now married and has a baby David Tyler HE – that's Charlie's one child only. Vicky has two children and they each are parents of two children. She has – <laughing> I can't remember – Vicky has Brad, Jr. – she's married to Donald Bradford Starr called Brad, and then they have Brad, Jr. and we have Claire Elise, named after her two great-grandmothers, and Claire has Nicholas and Sophia, and Brad has Griffith and Helena, named after--she's my namesake. And so we have five great-grandchildren and three grandchildren.

I: When – I'd like to – just as a sort of filling in here – you return to the children in the generations. What languages do you speak that you were exposed to?

HE: I was very fluent in Greek and after I went to boarding school I lost some of the fluency. I did go to Greek school. All the time before I went to boarding school I went to Greek school. And I could read and write.

I: Where was your Greek school?

HE: In San Francisco. It was the Denman school, I don't even know if it exists – I remember it was up on a hill and I'll tell you who our teacher was, Mr. Makrianis. He was quite well known. He eventually went to Los Angeles. And then my mother had a lady who taught Greek. Her name was Kiriaki <in Greek {210}> and Kiriaki <in Greek> was a terror and she lived with us for about two years. My mother thought that would be wonderful. And we used to get slapped if we didn't talk Greek, and my brother John turned off – wouldn't even say hello or good-bye in Greek and still is the same way – but I had enough, you know, I was all right on my Greek. So until my mother died I was pretty fluent and now I really don't speak Greek very much. When I go to Greece I do, though.

I: Well, during the time that she was there and you were expected to speak Greek, how did that work? Did you speak only Greek at home or?

HE: Well, she--

<talking simultaneously- unintelligible>

HE: we only spoke Greek at the table and to each other. And I don't know why she seemed – my mother had remarried and she was pretty busy and this was sort of, she was like our governess I guess you might say, whatever. She lived with us and she was in charge when they were out and she was in charge when, uh, my mother wasn't around.

I: Was your stepfather Greek?

HE: My stepfather was Irish, and my brother that just passed away, Joe, was half Irish and half Greek.

I: Oh, I see.

HE: But he claimed the Irish more. He wore a hat that said "I'm 100% Irish." That was always sort of a joke with us. So that's – I don't speak Greek really very much anymore. Most of my mother's friends are gone. In fact, I went to a funeral last week, Daphne Angel, who was one of those, just about one left of that generation of ladies now.

I: The opportunity is.

HE: That's it.

I: Well, if you can make a connection – can you try and make a connection please, between your current life, your contemporary life, and how the ancient heritage of the Greeks might have been important to you. In what way you think it might have been important.

HE: Well, I've always had a pride in being Greek. I never tried – you know, I've never felt anything but being proud of it. I did have an experience once, though, that I think this is what – would you like me to tell you about this? It made me be more proud of being Greek.

I: Yes.

HE: When I was in third grade I was at the French school, and I knew I was Greek but, you know, Greek didn't mean anything different. It was just like my name was Helen, I'm Greek – whatever. One day at the French school, which, they had a car that like I think was sort of like a limousine or whatever they had in those years

that used to pick us up in the morning and take us home in the afternoon. And we used to wait, we used to go down after school and play down in this courtyard until we were told to get into the car and I remember walking down, we had a – not stairs but a – what do you call it? Well, a ramp – down the ramp to the – and the girls were playing some kind of a circle game and I just walked in my usual way and they all ran away from me, except one. And I said, “Why are they all running away?” And she said, “Yvonne’s mother said she can’t play with you because you’re Greek.” Well, I was in shock – I didn’t even know what that meant. I’ll never forget that. And I don’t know how long I stayed there, but I remember this sister, wonderful nun Sister St. John was walking up the ramp and I was walking down and I was crying, she said, “What’s the matter?” I told her, I said, “Yvonne’s mother said she can’t play with me because I’m Greek.” And she comforted me, whatever, and I remember going home and my aunt, my aunt was living with us because by this time my grandfather lived in the Napa Valley and she was at Berkeley, and I told her and she said, “Helen, that’s something to be proud of. Don’t ever – don’t let anybody make you feel like this.” Well, the next morning, then I guess my mother – I don’t remember even telling my mother about it, but I think maybe my aunt told her or something. But whatever it was, the next morning I was in my classroom and somebody knocked on the door and this sister went over and opened the door, or a child opened the door, and there was my mother who was really quite beautiful and she had, I always remember this white fox fur down the front and a turban. If I was eight, she was twenty-eight, so you know. And she went like this, and I-

I: You mean, waving her hand?

HE: Yeah, at the door she went like that – this beautiful smile. And said something to the nun, whatever it was, the teacher, and then that was it. That Sister St. John, who was, I guess was a superior head, called Yvonne’s mother in, and my mother, to meet. Wasn’t that something? And whatever it was, we were all right after that. But from then on, I would say, “I’m Greek!” And I just found all these things to make me know that there was nothing wrong with being Greek. Then I understood what Greek was. Before it was just – whatever – you know, it had no meaning – except it was where I belonged. And from then on, and I never ever had trouble again. Now a lot of my friends will tell terrible horror stories about being called names and so on and all this business, but, uh, and of course, this happened at a private school, so I don’t know. After that was when I went to boarding school, and there was never any discussion, except that it was always built up because they were – we studied ancient history, almost to the exclusion of anything else up there.

I: How did you relate to that story, the ancient story?

HE: Oh, I loved it! Oh, yeah, I just felt good about all of it, about being Greek, and about the ancients – oh, sure. I never felt any different. But that was my one

experience. And I've heard some pretty bad ones from other people, but, so I lucked out there.

I: Well, you mentioned all your children, and grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Do you see, what kind of thread do you think has happened to pass on some of the ethnic customs and story and values from the Greek side?

HE: Well, unfortunately, they're not around it. Very honestly, I raised my children as Episcopalians because we were not near a Greek Church. In New York we lived in Westchester-- Now there's a church in every town in every county in every state practically. And from the old days, of course, that was okay, you know, because that was what you -- there weren't the Greek churches, so you went to the Episcopal Church. And, but they have always been interested and they've gone to the Greek Church. And my mother was buried in the Greek Church. And my grandchildren love the festivals, they love knowing they're part Greek, and that's all I can say about it, I can't do much more, because they're just not around it. But they're proud of it. They like to talk about it, they like to be -- In fact, my grandson wants to take his children to Greek Church, but that's an hour from Visalia to Fresno, see that's the closest one there, or there's Bakersfield, so I just said, "Go to the church where you know you'll be every Sunday." Because this is a long ride, you know, like an hour, hour and a half maybe. But he prefers it, he'd love to be able to go, yeah.

I: To switch to the other side of the picture and the American heritage and the values that you -- that are important to you and to the next generations after you -- how would you describe some of that, what part is has played and plays in your living?

HE: What the American?

I: Yes. The American heritage.

HE: Well, see I was born into it really. I mean, other than -- because I've always had as much -- I mean, I always knew I was an American, but I always also had the Greek -- oh, Greek-American I guess is what it is.

I: What values of the American heritage?

HE: Well, education -- but, of course, that isn't just American heritage, that's mainly Greek heritage, that is the -- I guess that's first in the Greek community, from the immigrant, you know, from those years, wanting their children to have that. <pause> Just our way of life. Recognizing people equal--all the ideals that we have in America. I can't, you know -- I agree with most of it.

I: Are a part of your way of thinking?

HE: I grew up that way.

I: Now, we do have a question about religion. You've already talked about that in several ways before, but now, just in reference to your own experience, what affiliation do you have if any? And how would you say it's played a part in your life?

HE: Well, it's been – it's where I belong. I just, you know, I've always belonged to the Greek Church. Charles has not, and I respect that. I mean, he was raised as a Unitarian and that's it. And I think he deserves – I respect him – I really respect him for staying with it, but he's strong in his beliefs. But he goes to the Greek Church and he supports the Greek Church, and also supports, in memory of his father, with the Unitarian – his father was the head, the president of the Unitarian Church, he was very active in it. And we support that heavily materially, and also the Greek Church equally. And so that's all I – but I don't change, that's where I am.

I: Well, I think this could be the ending of our interview for this purpose.

HE: Okay, all right.

I: Except.

<tape cuts off>

END OF INTERVIEW